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THE STORY OF JOB,
AND THE
END OF THE LORD SEEN.

BY

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“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord ; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

—*James v. 11.*

DRUMMOND'S TRACT DEPOT, STIRLING.

The Story of Job, and the End of the Lord Seen.

THE book of Job is very peculiar, and in several respects it stands alone among the books which make up the Bible. There are many difficulties in the way of comprehending it and getting the good of it ; and these difficulties are very much increased when we read only a few verses or a chapter at a time. More than any other book in the Bible, we had need to disregard the division into chapters, and to take time enough to read it through at a sitting ; aye, and to do this over and over again, till we come to be familiar with the different characters in it, and with the

subject which they discuss. When we have taken the necessary pains to acquaint ourselves with the subject and the way of handling it, we shall find it to be a subject which comes home to us all very closely and very often. This book perhaps reveals less than many other books of Scripture, for it is occupied rather with the workings of the spirit of man, the anxieties, the questionings, the hopes and fears which arise amid the troubles which overtake us all in life ; and thus it has come to pass that this book of Job has excited admiration and interest even among men of an unbelieving turn of mind who have cared little for the Gospel of Christ. Here we meet with thoughts and feelings such as we all may find at times in our breasts, and such as we may rather try to check than be willing to harbour, and whose presence we may not like to

acknowledge to any fellow-creature. But the gracious God, Who knows what is in man, and Who has made His Holy Word suit every condition of life, has given us this one book that is so wonderfully human in its sympathies, in order that those who are most harassed with doubts, and bowed down under burdens, and tempted by the devil, may find what will come home to them, and may be won back to the God of salvation. Did you ever ask your own hearts in secret, Is there a God at all? Is He the living, righteous One He is said to be? And if He is, why do such things happen as I see around me, or as I feel within me? Then turn to the character and history of Job, to which my text refers you; turn to the book of Job, by which alone that character and that history are known to us.

Of Job's character, in general, I need

not speak at length ; it is well known. He preserved his reputation for personal and family religion without a blemish during a good long life of marvellous prosperity, which therefore had not injured him. But he now came to be tried in exactly the opposite way, by a succession of misfortunes, if possible, more marvellous still ; and as his property, his family, and his health were all taken from him, his wife alone remaining, and she not a help to him but a hindrance, he did not sin even in word. Such a case is not to be met with elsewhere, so that his name has become a proverb. My text says, “Ye have heard of the patience of Job.” Nor is it only men that speak of him. The Lord Himself has borne witness to him three times over in the two opening chapters of the book, and ever with increasing fulness. For the third time He said to Satan: “Hast

thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.”

It was to Satan that this was spoken. There is not a word in the Bible which enables us to solve a question that has been keenly debated by wise and thoughtful men, both in countries enjoying the light of the Gospel and in countries where it was unknown : I mean the question of the origin of evil. It seems to be “a thing too high for us” to understand, how evil should have a beginning in the universe which was created by the good and holy God, and which was under His government. On this question, then, the Bible does not satisfy our enquiries. But it does tell us something that is both plain and important

as to sin entering our own world and spreading in it. It connects this with the skill and malice of a fallen spirit, Satan, the old serpent, the tempter of our first parents, the deceiver of the whole world, the accuser of the brethren ; who twice ventured to accuse Job to his God, and for a special reason was permitted to obtain a certain amount of power over Job. The veil is lifted up in the first two chapters of the book, so that we who read it are aware of some things which lessen the mystery. But that veil was not lifted from before Job and his friends, and to them the mystery was impenetrable at the time ; perhaps it never was wholly removed, for Satan did not venture to appear at the last, and his share in the events, or at least his complete discomfiture, may never have become known to them. And though some men may mock at the belief in a devil, to us

who humbly receive the teaching of the Bible, it is permitted to think that God for wise ends still permits Satan to work confusion and to present temptations, though at last he shall be put to shame when those are conquerors over him who have kept the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Three old and intimate friends of Job “heard of all this evil that was come upon him,” and they “made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him.” Yet when they came and saw him, they sat down with him on the ground in silence for an entire week ; whether it was that they were simply overwhelmed by the greatness of his misery, or whether they were already under the influence of a suspicion which soon led them to speak out and charge him with being himself the cause of his misfortunes.

Such a suspicion might be awakened in their minds by his way of speaking when at last his own lips broke the long silence, as he opened his mouth and cursed his birthday ; for it was a loss of patience and faith which made him speak so. A traitor and son of perdition, like Judas, might curse his birthday, since our Lord assures us that it had been better for him had he never been born ; but a child of God, who knows what he is, and what God has engaged to do for him, has no right to use such language. However these things might be, the silence, once broken, was to be followed by a long and keen discussion. Like some great match which champions fight out in repeated struggles, this discussion took the form of three rounds, each of the three friends speaking once in each round. But the last round was left unfinished ; for the third and most violent

of Job's old friends seems to have spent himself before his turn came to speak the third time ; and Job, who had maintained his cause in single combat against all the three, was left with the last word, like a conqueror keeping his ground in the end upon some well fought battle-field from which the army that opposed him has been content to retire.

What then was the nature and object of this discussion ? What was the turning-point in this long, hot controversy ? It was this : How do the righteous come to suffer under the government of the good and holy God ? Or, giving the question a form that made it plainer by making it more personal, what was the meaning of these extraordinary sufferings which had come upon a man with Job's high religious profession and reputation ? A personal controversy is almost certain to be embitt-

tered, always the more so in proportion to the noble nature of the matters discussed. It is this which is apt to make religious controversies so bitter ; and the one recorded in the book of Job is no exception to the common rule, till the alienation of his friends and their imputations on his religious profession came to be the heaviest of all the trials which the malice of Satan contrived to bring on the holy man.

How, then, are we to account for the sufferings of those who are reputed to be righteous ? How were the friends of Job to account for his sufferings ? There are three answers which occur in the speeches of Job and his friends ; and to these in succession we may look.

The FIRST answer, and in many respects the easiest to give, if the facts would only square with it, would be, that there was no mystery whatever in the case ; that Job

was not righteous in reality, but only in pretence ; that God was stripping the hypocrite's cloak from off him, and in these tremendous sufferings was setting him naked in the sight of the whole world which he had deceived, exposed without shelter to those judgments of heaven which descended on him in punishment for his sins. It was indeed a very bold way of meeting the question, on account of the unblemished reputation for peculiar holiness which Job had hitherto enjoyed ; and so at first it was insinuated with great hesitation, and as if God had cast away his sins, rather than himself, in their transgression (chap. viii. 4). But as the disputants grew hotter, Job was violently charged with many crimes of the grossest kind, though said to be done craftily and in secret ; and these monstrous charges were made by the mildest and wariest of the three friends

(chap. xv., xxii.). Job met these charges by the strongest possible assertions of his innocence, and therefore of his confidence in God. Not certainly that he meant to make himself out absolutely free from sin ; no man can “ bring a clean thing out of an unclean ; ” this was Job’s own account of human nature (chap. xiv. 4). Nor yet was it that he looked carelessly on what men call little sins, and thought that God would not be strict to mark them ; for his whole language shows that he believed God to be very strict in reckoning with man. But Job’s denial that God was punishing him for what his sins deserved, Job’s assertion of his freedom from guilt, depended on his faith in a Redeemer or Mediator. I cannot tell how much he knew about the Mediator : it might be very little compared with what children know now. But certainly he knew enough to lead him to

refer to this matter again and again ; and once in language so grand that, in the full light of the Gospel, we cannot get beyond it. For after a very dark time, under the assaults of his friends, he broke out, in words perhaps as well known as any in the book (chap. xix. 25), "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth : and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another."

Here was Job's safety, when men accused him, and when his misery perhaps stirred up his conscience to question him strictly how it was with his soul. But how is it with you ? In loss of property, or blighting of hopes, or family trials, or pain of body, or desertion by friends, or fear of death, how is it with you ? These are

evils to which we are all exposed : to some of us they may have come very close, on some of us they may have been heaped heavily. Put to yourselves honestly the question, How could you answer the charge if it was made against you as it was made against Job ? What if these sorrows and sufferings are the first droppings of that storm of vengeance in which God is to “rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and a horrible tempest,” on His enemies ? You cannot say that they are not the pledges of the coming judgment, unless like Job you have taken refuge with the Redeemer : “Other refuge have I none.” When He lays judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, the hail shall sweep away the refuges of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. The friends of Job were mistaken in their application to the man, but their principles were in them

selves right enough. And until you know that your Redeemer liveth, you cannot say that God's wrath and curse are not in any cup of sorrow which you have to drink. Make sure about your great concern, and see to it that you have an interest in Christ.

But there is a SECOND and milder answer that might be given in explanation of such sufferings as Job's; and his friends did give it, at least at times, though they often lost sight of it, and confounded chastisement and punishment, as people do still. A father sometimes says that he must punish his child, when he means that he must chastise him. For, strictly speaking, punishment is inflicted by a just and offended judge upon those who have broken the law, making them suffer as they have deserved, even though that suffering should make an end of them in death.

But chastisement is the loving correction of a father, who freely forgives his child the fault which it has committed, yet who thinks it for the child's good to correct it sharply. He never is in such a proper frame for chastising as when there is no anger or offence at the child in his own breast, when he feels that he would rather suffer the chastisement himself than inflict it, and yet he inflicts it because of his very love for his child. And thus God deals with His children ; and thus God might be dealing with Job, not as with an enemy, whose sins He was punishing, but as with one pardoned and made accepted in the Redeemer, whose errors he was visiting in love, to wean him from them. Even when sin has been forgiven, there are roots of bitterness which need to be taken away ; especially there is backsliding, which makes a coldness and a separation between us and

Him whom we claim as our God, and His very love makes Him use the rod to bring us back. It was thus that Job's friends began cautiously and gently, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth; therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty" (v. 17). And many were their urgent invitations to him to return and repent, when it would be better with him than it had been even at the beginning. Now, the remarkable thing in the speeches of Job is his utterly refusing to listen to any calls to repentance whatsoever. The only effect of them seems to be a sort of maddening him into a frenzy. If he strongly denied that he was an enemy of God enduring punishment, with no less emphasis he denied that he was a backslider on whom these strokes had fallen, to bring to his remembrance any secretly cherished cause of separation from God. Read his

words. (xxvii. 2-6): "As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul; all the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live."

I shall not venture to say that in the main Job was wrong in this. On the contrary, I believe, on the testimony of the Lord Himself to Satan, and from the lesson of the whole book, that in the main Job was right. It is a bad spiritual state when a man is in any way a backslider, when he knows that he is in a worse state than he once was, or when he does not know it just because he is resolved not to think upon

the matter, and it is in these circumstances that God so often chastises his own children ; they are sick, and he gives them bitter medicine to restore their health. But it is a dangerous thing to make confessions unless we feel that they are true. I am afraid that good people often make such false confessions in their prayers. Far from falling into this error, Job maintained that he was healthy already, and in this he was right ; and I wish most earnestly that we could learn a lesson from him, that of walking with God so humbly, so closely, that we could speak, like the apostle Paul, of the testimony of our conscience to our simplicity and godly sincerity in our daily converse in the world, and of living in all good conscience before God unto this day. And yet the holiest men have a humility which can scarcely be hid even when, like that apostle, they are compelled to boast.

Job's previous conduct may have been—I believe it was—all that he said ; yet there was a hardness and a rashness in his way of asserting this. There was an unwarrantable way of charging even God with having used him harshly ; and no wonder, then, that he retorted their violent language upon his friends. Whereas a child of God may get matter for self-examination even from the accusations of enemies, much more from friends who speak unkindly. I suppose David had met with friends like Job's, when yet he was able to say : “ Let the righteous smite me ; it shall be a kindness : and let Him reprove me ; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head ” (Ps. cxli. 5).

And thus we are led to a THIRD explanation of Job's sufferings, an explanation to which his friends were never able to approach, and of which he himself seems

only to have had a glimpse. And yet it was the true explanation. In chap. xxiii. 10-12, he follows up some very gloomy utterances about his being unable to meet with God, by this language of faith and hope : " But He knoweth the way that I take : when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held His steps, His way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips ; I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." His sufferings were not a punishment from an offended judge, as if he were an enemy of God ; they were not even fatherly chastisements meant to correct his backslidings, and send him home to his Father's house, from which he had been wandering. But these sufferings were a trial sent on him by God, and the trial should have the blessed effect of

purifying him, like gold melted in the furnace. You hold a piece of precious metal in your hand, which looks to you like pure gold ; and you call it so, without being far wrong. But you show it to a goldsmith, who tells you that it is not altogether pure, that there is a baser metal mixed with it. How are you to get it absolutely pure ? Let him throw it into the crucible ; and as it melts there, the alloy will be separated, the scum will rise to the surface, and other particles will be consumed away, till the gold will at length be run off in its purity. So it was with Job. He was righteous in the sense in which every one is righteous who is reconciled to God. He was pure to human eyes, and his own heart bore witness to the closeness of his walk with God. Yet he well knew, and had over and over confessed, that there was sin in his nature which God saw and marked,

though he himself and others saw it not. But he was cast into the furnace of affliction. He was placed in difficult and trying circumstances, as good king Hezekiah once was, of whom it is written that "God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. xxxii. 31). Hezekiah learned things about himself which he would not otherwise have known or believed. And so did Job ; for once he spoke rashly and wrongly of God as laughing at the trial of the innocent (chap. ix. 22, 23) ; but now, in the furnace which had been so wonderfully heated, he saw dross coming to the surface, of whose very existence he would have had no notion in his old, ordinary, quiet life. Yet, until the trial was completed, he could get only a glimpse of its nature ; for it would have been no trial at all, or none worth speaking about, if he had seen and understood

everything about it while it was going on. And so he and his friends had to struggle with a great mystery, like men at sea, without a compass, in a fog; and the fog was the thicker, the mystery was the greater, because the hand of Satan was so busy in the whole affair, as it is likely that he is busy still in things which we find burdensome and perplexing.

And a singular thing in the history of Job is, that he had a fourth friend, much younger than the three who carried on the dispute; and this friend waited modestly till they were done, and till Job too had ceased to speak, after they were vanquished. But when Elihu did begin, he laid his finger on the sore spot in Job's state like a skilful physician. He made no wild accusations of Job on account of sins done before the sufferings began, but he showed him how he had sinned in the course of his

sufferings, how the soreness of the trial had brought to light the evil which lurked in his nature unknown to himself. And Job had not a word to say in his own defence, though he was urged in the most respectful and affectionate language to speak if he could say anything. And thus it was that Elihu could also call him to submit to God and trust in Him, without producing any of the irritation which was immediately caused by the advices of the three friends.

The interest of this remarkable book reaches its highest point when the Lord Himself answers Job out of the whirlwind. The Lord speaks of His majesty, His wisdom, and His strength; and ever and again He suggests the question to us, what wonder that we cannot understand his procedure? And yet a blind submission to a great power which we cannot resist is not the lesson that we are to learn; for we

find that we are dealing with a living person, and we feel that His natural perfections of power, and wisdom, and majesty must be accompanied by the moral perfections of justice, and goodness, and truth ; it would be revolting to our nature to think of an unholy and unjust Maker and Ruler of the universe. And thus, though Job might not have the mysteries of God's providence solved, though he might not be able well to understand the discourses spoken from out the whirlwind, he could endure all this when the great truth was sure and plain, that the Lord had answered him,—had condescended to speak with him at all. After this, he felt convinced that everything must be right, and sooner or later would be seen to be all plain. All his hard sayings against God were now known to be inexcusable, and were humbly withdrawn. “Behold, I am vile : what shall I answer

thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth" (chap. xl. 4). And again, after a confession of his own folly and presumption: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (chap. xlii. 5, 6).

"Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord." Thus you are carried from Job's patience to the end of the Lord; for Job's patience was not perfect, though it was very remarkable. This apostle James counsels us: "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (i. 4). Yet in seeking to have perfect patience, we must turn away from even the most advanced disciple to the Master; we must look, not to Job, but to Jesus. For thus it is written to the Hebrews: "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which

doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus " (xii. 1, 2).

Job had learned very thoroughly this practical lesson which we also need to learn ; he was truly humbled when he was brought so close to God. Yet when God's children have most humility they have also the greatest confidence in God their Saviour. And Job had recovered his confidence by his confession ; nay, when he had condemned himself he was openly acknowledged and acquitted by the Lord, just as all Christ's people shall be at the last day, when they shall be associated with Him in judging the world. And thus accepted and acknowledged, Job was called on to act as an intercessor on behalf of those three friends, whose hard sayings against himself he had forgiven, as he tasted the sweetness of God's forgiveness of himself ; and it is as an

intercessor that Ezekiel (chap. xiv.) celebrates him, coupled with Noah and Daniel. Copy Job in this ; and if you know the blessedness of the Lord's dealings with your own souls, ask to be a means of blessing to others with whom you are connected ; and not the less so, if you have even suffered at their hands.

Finally, the apostle says in my text: "Behold we count them happy which endure." Take this for a test of your character. God's Word teaches you to count a man like Job happy in his very trials, and on account of them. This apostle James does not scruple to write: "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." This is not the world's notion of joy and happiness, but rather to escape trials, not to need to endure, to get everything one's own way, to succeed in all one's undertakings. Well, put the question to yourself, Does your

notion of happiness agree with God's notion or with the worlds notion? And if your notion disagrees with God's, is it God that is right? Then what are you?

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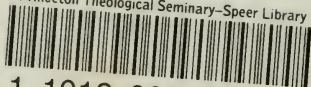
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